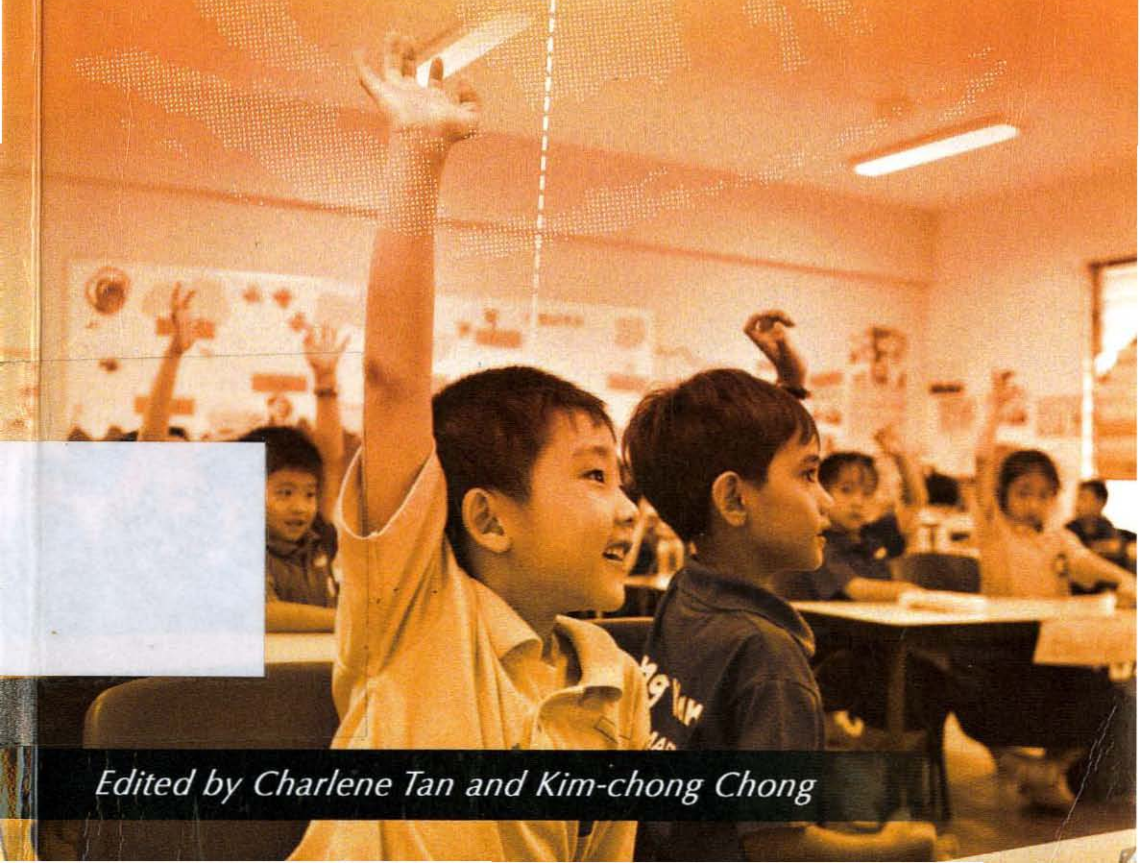


CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON VALUES EDUCATION IN ASIA



Edited by Charlene Tan and Kim-chong Chong

Critical Perspectives on Values Education in Asia

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**Charlene Tan
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CHAPTER 6

Education in Fostering a United and Caring Citizenship in Malaysia

Rosnani HASHIM

Introduction

Multiculturalism is on the rise in even typically homogeneous nations such as the European countries and Japan. This new cultural diversity that has developed in the local arena poses a new problem of national unity and identity. As each ethnic group desires to maintain its culture, religion and language, it poses a problem for the central government which would like to see the use of a common language and its citizens being united and sharing a common destiny. The diversity of culture, ethnicity, race and language, especially when any of these variables is used to provide special privileges to some groups and deny others equal opportunities to participate, will create tension, instability, upheaval, racial polarisation and conflict (Hashim, 2005). The challenges of multiculturalism in democratic education have been raised by Gutmann (1995) who argued that integrating the aims of cultivating a concern for human beings alongside a sense of civic responsibility, and coping with the conflicts between them, is the most formidable challenge for the philosophy and practice of democratic education.

Being a pluralistic country, Malaysia has her share of problems. These are the perennial problems of equitable economic distribution and political representation among the various ethnic groups. Recently, there was a spate of issues that strained ethnic relations such as the allegation that the Ethnic Relations textbook for use in the University Putra Malaysia was biased against the Chinese; the Islamic civilisation course required for all university students was not Malaysian enough and therefore it was changed to the Asian Civilisation course to incorporate the three major civilisations – Islam, Confucianism and Hinduism; the issue of religious conversion especially involving conversion to Islam without the knowledge of the family which complicates matters of burial upon death and inheritance; and lately, the issue of moral policing by State Religious Department officers. In this chapter, we are going to examine how Malaysia continues to build the nation to a common destiny. It looks at the extent of Malaysia's success from the perspective of education, especially at the role of the educational curriculum, and analyses some of the problems associated with it.